

The National Alliance of Women's Organisations and
The Equality and Human Rights Commission's celebration of the report:

“Is Britain Fairer?”

The state of equality and human rights 2015”

7 December 2015



Report written and compiled by Monika Pindel

NAWO & EHRC – Is Britain Fairer?



In autumn 2015 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published its latest report entitled “[Is Britain Fairer? The state of equality and human rights 2015](#)”. On the 7th December 2015 The National Alliance of Women’s Organisations (NAWO) in partnership with EHRC and the support of Baroness Hodgson of Abinger, organised an event to mark the launch of the report and to discuss the state of equality in the UK, especially with regards to gender equality.

Chaired by Zarin Hoinsworth, OBE, Chair of NAWO, the event attracted a wide audience. Zarin and Baroness Hodgson opened the event and welcomed the speakers and the audience. Baroness Hodgson highlighted that though

progress had been made in the UK and internationally in terms of gender issues, there is still not a single country which has achieved gender equality. In order to progress we need to find out what the current situation and trends are. And this is exactly what the EHRC’s report sets out to achieve.

Melanie Field, Executive Director, Strategy and Policy EHRC, presented the methodology of the report and the ten key domains covered including Education, Productive and Valued Activities, Health and Individual, Family and Social Life. These domains are not only covered in the “Is Britain Fairer?” report but are accompanied by comprehensive evidence papers published on EHRC website. Melanie also mentioned a few key challenges such as the worsening situation of young people especially when looking at their employment opportunities.



This introduction to the EHRC latest report was followed by a more in-depth review of the current state of inequality in the UK and the key equality and human rights challenges over the coming years delivered by Colin Douglas, Interim Director for the “Is Britain Fairer?” Review. Colin highlighted a number of areas of progress and some challenges. The average pay gap between women and men narrowed from between 2008 and 2013, from 22.5 per cent to 20 per cent but this took place in a context of declining men’s wages. The gender pay gaps widen with age and ranges from 3.5 per cent for the 16-24 age group to above 20 per cent for those aged 40 and over, which seriously impacts on women in their later lives. Similarly the situation is complex when looking at gender, education and graduate-level employment. Girls’ educational attainment increase has failed to translate into rewards in the workplace as illustrated by the aforementioned pay gap and women’s employment continuing to be concentrated in low-wage sectors. Though women continue to outlive men, the proportion of women reporting having bad or very bad health has increased in both England and Scotland. Colin also discussed the report’s findings regarding criminal justice and sexual violence. In England there was no change in the reported prevalence of sexual violence and Scotland recorded a decline from 1.6 per cent to 1 per cent (from 2008 to 2013), though the number of rapes and attempted rapes recorded by the police increased across

NAWO & EHRC – Is Britain Fairer?

England, Wales and Scotland. Also the number of incidence domestic abuse recorded by the police in England and Wales increased between 2008 and 2013. Colin also highlighted one area of success – the voluntary target for the FTSE 100 of 25 per cent female board representation was met but women are still under-represented in both executive and non-executive directorships.



The summary of the report's main findings was followed by a presentation by Baroness Prosser, Former Vice-Chair EHRC. She began by noting the main equality acts existing in the United Kingdom and pointed out that there is a lot we can learn from the way the [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#) was implemented. The combination of awareness raising and creation of

further statutory instruments has resulted in a very high compliance with the Act. Baroness Prosser commented that if similar efforts were applied to the implementation of e.g. [Equal Pay Act 1970](#) or [Sex Discrimination Act 1975](#) we would be much closer to closing gender pay gap and achieving gender equality. Thus the challenges that lie ahead include updating the legislation to make it fit for purpose in the twenty-first century and taking further steps towards improved implementation of current legislation such as the Equal Pay Act or improving the conditions of maternity/paternity and Shared Parental Leave. We are also facing challenges in the area of work and pension, including the implementation of Living Wage, providing protection for part-time and seasonal workers and ensuring that work on a part-time/job-sharing basis offers a clear career path. To strengthen the competitiveness of the British economy we need to provide good quality and affordable childcare, encourage girls to study Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and to try and overcome the gender occupational segregation. Though our efforts to date have helped to move the UK from 26th to 18th place on the Global Gender Gap Index 2015, the World Economic Forum's report and our experiences clearly show that we need to re-double our efforts if our aim is the creation of equal and prosperous society.

Some of the issues presented by Baroness Prosser were also discussed from the point of the British youth. Gemma Welsh, Lead Representative, NAWO Young Women's Alliance, commenced her presentation with gender biases regarding education and employment. She insisted that the only way to overcome this was education – both formal in the form of gender equality being included in the curriculum but also informal on overcoming unconscious bias.



NAWO & EHRC – Is Britain Fairer?

Gemma also spoke about issues raised by the EHRC report but framed it around her experiences as a young person. Two of the main issues in Gemma's opinion was women's under-representation in decision-making positions and in the media. According to Girlguiding UK survey 2015 (available [here](#)):

- Four in five girls aged 11 to 21 report that in the past week they had experienced or observed some form of everyday sexism (81%), rising to nearly nine in ten 17- to 21-year-olds (87%).
- Three in five heard jokes or remarks that belittled or degraded girls and women first hand (58%), and half heard the same in a film or on TV (53%).
- More than half (55 per cent) say that they had seen the media talk about women's appearance before their achievements, while half (52 per cent) had seen women pictured in newspapers or magazines in a sexualised way that made them feel uncomfortable;
- Two in five (42 per cent) had read something in the media that trivialised violence or abuse towards women; and
- 75 per cent of girls and young women are anxious about potentially experiencing sexual harassment.

The stereotyping and trivialisation of violence against women translates not only into anxiety of 75 per cent of girls and young women worrying about potentially experiencing sexual harassment (Girlguiding survey 2015) but also sadly seems to lead to crimes against women:

- 40 per cent of teenage schoolgirls experienced sexual coercion, with physical violence and abuse being a factor in 20 per cent of relationships ([NSPCC](#), 2015);
- 1 in 4 students have been sexually assaulted ([NUS](#), 2014);
- 1 in 4 domestically abused in their lifetime with estimated cost of £15.73 billion a year in terms of costs to services, economic output, human and emotional costs ([Women's Aid](#)).



Gemma said that for her and many of her friends the statistics reflect the reality. She called for more sexual education at schools but also underlined the importance of emotional literacy which never gets mentioned at school. The 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing agreed a Platform for Action (PfA) with three strategic objectives ([UN Women](#)):

- Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies.
- Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.
- Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

Gemma concluded her presentation saying that Government's efforts and support have enabled the progress in the field of gender equality but more needs to be done to translate the objectives of PfA into a reality, thus transforming lives of not just girls and women but of the entire society.

NAWO & EHRC – Is Britain Fairer?

Following the presentations the floor was open to questions and discussion. The event's participants spoke very passionately about the issues of gender equality and pointed out some areas where more work is needed. These issues included gender roles in families, recognition and valuation of unpaid care work, issues linked with pornography and prostitution. There was a clear desire for the UK to ratify the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the [Istanbul Convention](#)) which should translate into tangible changes to the way violence against women and girls is tackled. Participants were enthusiastic to continue the discussion. NAWO agreed to create a suitable space. We are pleased to report that we are working on a new online initiative which will enable this debate to continue and hope to launch it in February or March 2016. Please check NAWO [webpage](#) for updates.



On behalf of NAWO we would like to thank everyone involved in the preparation and delivery of this event.

“Is Britain Fairer?” – reports available to download:

Full report	PDF	Word
Executive summary	PDF	Word
Easy Read	PDF	
Welsh Language (Executive summary)	PDF	
British Sign Language	video	

